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His Wife's Place



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THE DAKOTA PLAYMAKERS 1920

Playmaker Plays

Written by Students of the University of North Dakota
as Class Work in the Course in
DRAMATIC COMPOSITION

Edited by
FRANZ RICKABY
Assistant Professor of English
University of North Dakota

No. 4

Series E

HIS WIFE'S PLACE

(An Adaptation of the Story by Clarence Buddington Kelland)

by

Ruth L. Baughman

Published
by
THE DAKOTA PLAYMAKERS
of the
University of North Dakota

University of North Dakota

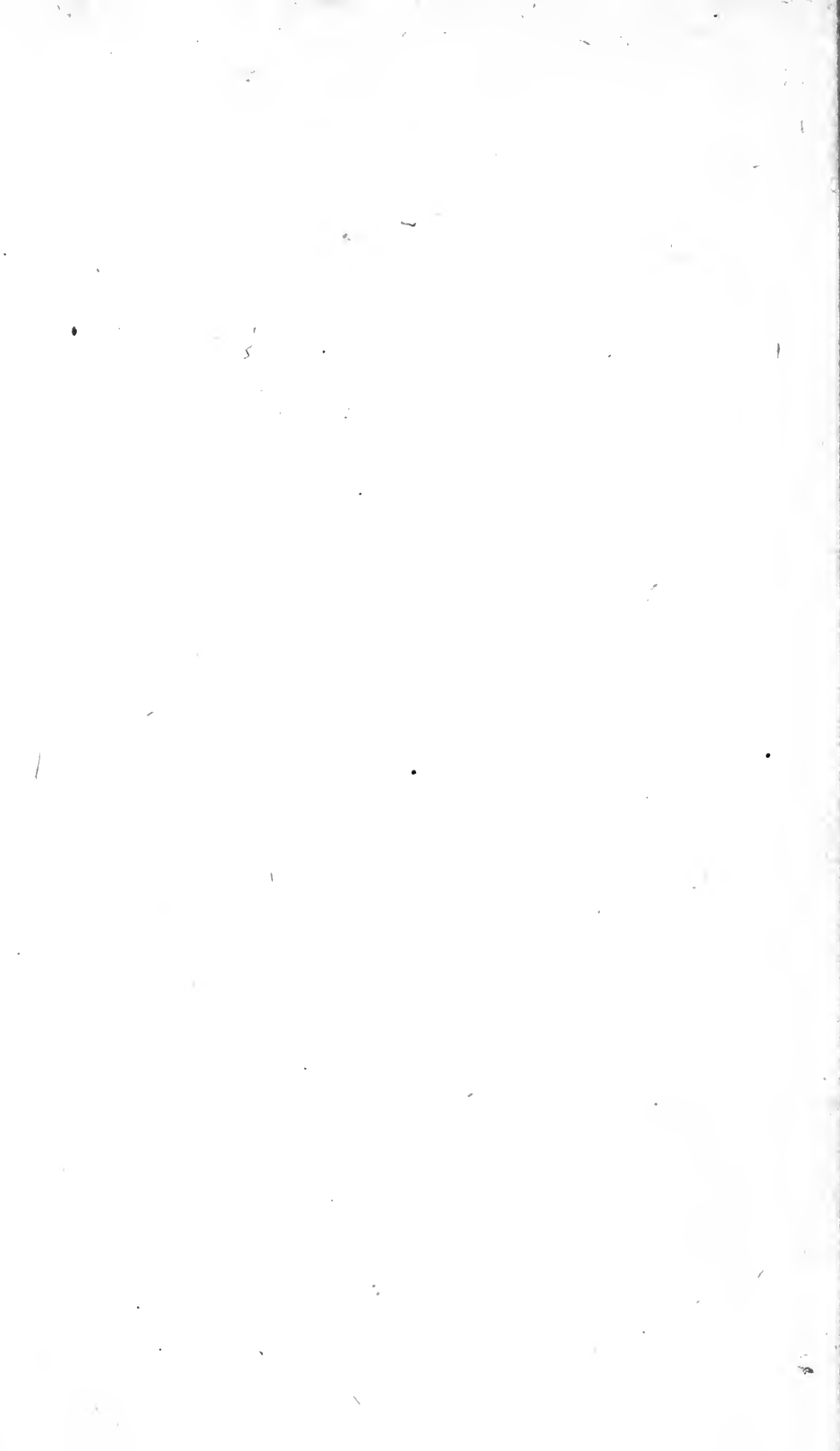


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Copies of the Plays may be obtained, at the rate of fifty cents each, from the Dakota Playmakers, University, North Dakota.



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THE PLAYMAKER PLAYS

A GENERAL FOREWORD

As indicated on the cover of this pamphlet, the Playmaker Plays represent the collaboration of the Dakota Playmakers, the dramatic organization at the University of North Dakota, and the University course in Dramatic Composition, offered first by Professor Frederick H. Koch in 1915, and for the past two years by the editor of this series.

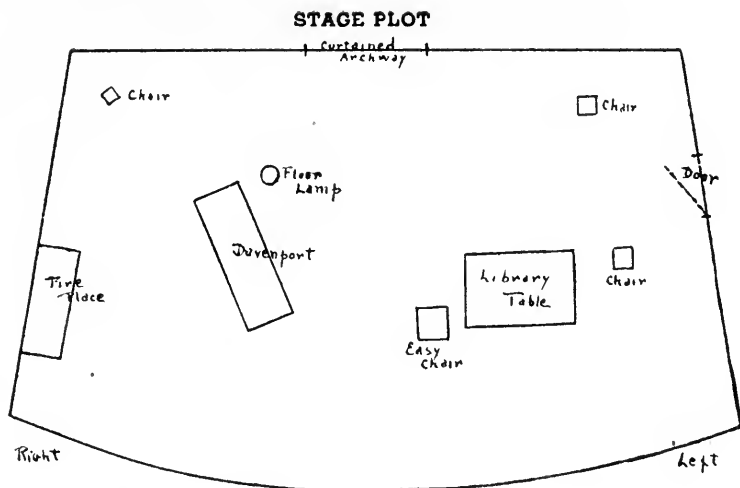
These plays make no pretensions to surpassing excellence in the various elements of dramatic writing. They are merely little experiments done as laboratory work in a course which has as its chief purpose, not the immediate fashioning of playwrights, so much as the steady recruiting of the ranks of those who can appreciate drama from each of the several angles of appreciation.

The purpose behind publication in this case is the supplying of high-school societies and other amateur groups in the territory which this University serves, with these examples of native drama. This purpose had its birth in frequent queries, from outsiders who had seen or heard of the University productions, or from graduated Playmakers who had taken part in them, as to whether or not the plays were available for general use. They were not. Quite commonly there was no extant copy of the play in question. It will be impossible to include in this series any of the plays written previous to 1918-19, among them some excellent ones, because the manuscripts are not now available.

It is a source of warm satisfaction to the editor that literally scores of citizens of this state will feel a deep and living interest in these plays, for having either written them or acted in them, or for bearing some peculiar relationship to those who did. These are truly "our little plays"; we conceived them, and we have acted them. They are not masterpieces, but they are clean, and they have entertained our neighbors and friends. Some of them picture North Dakota men and women in the business of living; all of them represent the North Dakota student in the business of adapting and building.

To the cause of Native American Drama the Playmakers dedicate their plays, and bespeak for them the attention and interest of all who like to hear a story and take sides in a conflict, and who at the same time believe in beginnings. Encouragement alone will beget more and better plays. For those who would be too harshly critical we might quote a line from one of our earlier plays, the words of an old Scandinavian mother to her newly returned supercilious and over-educated son: "Vel, Alf, dis is all ve got!"

F. R.



CHARACTERS: CARTER PAYAN, A returned army officer.
 MARY PAYAN, His wife.
 MR. HENRY SEARS, A bank president and old friend of the Payans.
 A MAID.

SCENE: Living room of the Payan apartment.

TIME: 1918. Five o'clock one winter afternoon.

HIS WIFE'S PLACE was presented by The Playmakers on their Play-Stage at the University on the evenings of April 15 and 16, 1920, with the following cast of characters:

| | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| CARTER PAYAN | RICHARD L. BAUGHMAN |
| MARY PAYAN | RUTH L. BAUGHMAN |
| MR. SEARS | WILLIAM HAGEN |
| A MAID | EDNA HESKETH |

HIS WIFE'S PLACE

The rising curtain discloses the living room of a richly and tastefully furnished apartment in New York City. There is a draped archway at the center back which opens obviously into a hall. On the walls are a number of good pictures. Several comfortable chairs, a beautiful rug, a davenport before the lighted gas grate at the right, and floor lamp near the upper end of the davenport. To the left is a large library table and a leather-upholstered armchair. On the table is the button of an electric bell. There is a single door at the left.

CARTER enters through the center doorway, tall, good-looking, but rather arrogant appearing. He is at present distinctly out of sorts and looks as though he not only had his feathers ruffled the wrong way but also as though he might soon become distinctly angry. He takes off his coat, hat and gloves, at the same time looking the room over with a sneer on his face. He examines a couple of pictures on the wall, touches the hangings contemptuously, throws his things on a chair up-stage and sits on davenport before the fireplace. Glances hands, resting his head on them, and stares grimly into the fire.

MARY enters from the left. She is a pretty, capable looking little lady in a business woman's garb; a modish suit skirt and a simple white blouse. She seems both sweet and sensible. She goes enthusiastically toward CARTER. *(Speaks.)* Oh, Carter, I beat you home tonight. It's been the best day! You'll never guess the big surprise I have for you. *(CARTER doesn't respond in any way.)* Why, Carter, what's the matter? *(Goes closer to him. Rings for the maid.)* Aren't you well, dear? *(CARTER still doesn't respond. Enter MAID. MARY indicates that she is to remove CARTER's wraps. Exit MAID. MARY goes toward CARTER solicitously.)* What have you been doing with yourself all day?

CARTER—*(Shortly)* Thinking.

MARY—Did you see Mr. Whitney this morning?

CARTER—*(More shortly)* Yes.

MARY—What did he say?

CARTER—*(Bitterly)* Offered me my old place—at twenty-two hundred and fifty.

MARY—*(With enthusiasm)* Oh splendid! That's a raise, isn't it. So many of the returned men are having to take less, or are even finding it hard to get places at all.

CARTER—(*Resentfully*) Splendid! Anybody would think I was your half-witted brother that you were praising for being able to earn a quarter mowing a lawn.

MARY—(*Surprised at his tone*) Why Carter! It *is* splendid. I mean it. Between the two of us we're earning over \$6,000! Why we're rich. And when I tell you about the wonderful surprise—

CARTER—(*Rising and confronting her suddenly*) Mary, do you mean to say that you are going on working? Do you think I shall let you go on working?

MARY—(*Bewildered and hurt*) I don't see why not. There's no reason why I shouldn't. There are just the two of us—

CARTER—(*Breaking in harshly*) Just the two of us can live on what I earn.

MARY—Of course we could, but the way I have it planned—

CARTER—Yes, the way you have it planned you'd have me the laughing stock of all the men. (*Changing his voice to imitate his conception of the mincing voice of gossip*) "There's Carter Payan. pretty soft for him, what? Wife earns twice what he does. Wonder how much she allows him for spending money?"—That's the kind of thing everybody'd be saying about me.

MARY—That's perfectly silly, Carter, and you know it is.

CARTER—I know it isn't. Why, every man of the old gang I saw today said practically that very thing. Old man Summers comes up, slaps me on the back, tells me how glad he is to see me safe home and then says, "Just saw your wife over at the office. Pretty soft, old scout, pretty soft! It isn't the first cost of a wife with most of us that bothers; it's the upkeep; but you've solved it Carter. Great stuff! Get married and two can earn more than one. If either one of you has to stay home and wash the egg off the breakfast plates, it'll have to be you. If you aren't careful Mary'll be the best man in the family."—That's what I've got all day. It's what they're all saying and thinking about me already.

MARY—(*Evenly*) Nonsense; Mr. Summers is an old, old friend of both of us, and you know he was only teasing you.

CARTER—(*Warmly*) Teasing nothing. He was saying what he believed.

MARY—(*Nettled by his attitude, speaks defiantly*) Well, what of it?

CARTER—(*Angrily*) Just this. You quit your job tomorrow and stay home where a woman belongs.

MARY—(*Taking herself firmly in hand*) Now, Carter, try to be reasonable. It isn't sensible to throw away all that money just for your silly pride. You know that I'd rather be in my home tending to a woman's duties, her house and her children. You know I want all that, but it can't be until we are able to suitably provide for a home in the truest sense of the word. I want my children to grow up with all the education and advantages that make for a broad and beautiful life untouched by the restrictions that poverty im-

poses. The fact that I'm getting more money than you is all a sort of accident, but we would be foolish not to profit by it. You know very well that in ordinary times I couldn't earn half what you do. But the war—and all. If nearly every man in our office hadn't enlisted or been drafted, I should be getting a quarter of what I am. But they had to have somebody. I needed something to do to keep my loneliness at arm's length. I applied for the position, I got it, and I—I was lucky enough to make good. It's no reflection on you.

CARTER—It is a reflection on me. Would you like to be told that your wife was the best man in the family?

MARY—I could stand to be told a lot for four thousand dollars a year—when I knew it was not so.

CARTER—Well I can't and shan't. You quit tomorrow.

MARY—(*Angered at last*) I'll quit when I'm good and ready. I've a right to work if I wish. I'm your wife, but you don't own me. I've some rights. There's no reason why I shouldn't help out when I can, and I'm going to. When there's a chance to save a lot of money and get into a position where we're safe, I have a right to insist that we profit by it, and I'm going to insist. (*Stopping suddenly*) Oh, Carter, here we are quarreling like two children and Mr. Sears will be here any moment. I've invited him to dinner. Come let's dress for dinner and when we've both cooled off I'll tell you about a wonderful opportunity and we'll talk it over quietly.

CARTER—(*Raging*) By heavens, we won't wait. We'll settle this thing now—*now*. Do you understand that?

MARY—(*Coldly*) It isn't necessary for all the neighbors to hear you.

CARTER—(*Sneeringly*) You're mighty careful of the neighbors. What the devil do I care about a few neighbors when the whole town is talking about me? I've heard nothing else all day. (*Strides savagely up and down the room*) I've had enough. I'm through. I've pleaded and begged you to act the way a wife ought to, and you've refused; now I'm going to *tell* you. I'm your husband and what I say goes.

MARY—(*Holding herself in check*) Carter, go and get ready for dinner. Mr. Sears will be here any moment. When you are reasonable we'll talk.

CARTER—We'll talk now. This thing is going to be settled before I move from this spot. You're my wife—anyhow I thought you were. I've tried to be a decent sort of husband, even if I haven't been able to buy you expensive pictures with which you've adorned the walls since I left for France. I won't be treated like this. I won't stand it. An old friend tells me you're the best man in the family; an old hen stenographer in the office twits me that you can earn more than I do. All my friends grin and tell me what a soft snap I have. How would you like that? Would *you* stand it?

MARY—Nobody thinks anything disagreeable, Carter. You're unnaturally sensitive. Try to look at this sensibly. There isn't a man who has spoken to you who doesn't wish his wife were doing what I'm doing. Nobody's twitted you.

CARTER—(*Roughly*) What I want to know is, what are you going to do?

MARY—(*Coldly calm*)—I'm not going to talk about it while you're in this state of mind.

CARTER—You're mighty independent. Four thousand dollars a year makes for a lot of independence, doesn't it? You don't need me any more with my piker's salary. You'd just as soon I cleared out, I suppose.

MARY—(*Distinctly, and with intention. There are limits to even a woman's endurance.*)—I don't know but I'd rather, if you're going to act this way.

CARTER—Are you going to quit that job?

MARY—No.

CARTER—(*Threateningly*) Mary!

MARY—(*With chill in her voice*) If you're going to have dinner, please dress.

CARTER—You're not going to obey—?

MARY—(*Turning on him furiously*) Obey! I'm going to do exactly as I want to. Obey! Do you think you can order me about like a servant? I've had all I can stand of this. Either be quiet and dress for dinner, or I'm going to leave this room.

CARTER—(*Bellows*) Are you going to quit that job?

MARY—I'm going to keep my position as long as I can hold it. Now you know. And that's final. (*She brushes past CARTER and out the door at left, banging it behind her. CARTER starts toward door, turns furiously and paces up and down the room, frowning and biting his lips. At last stands in front of fireplace with his back to center door.*)

MAID—(*Enters at the back to announce*) Mr. Sears. (*CARTER turns. MR. SEARS enters through center door. He is a genial old man in the neighborhood of sixty years; rather stocky in stature, with hair and mustache well grayed. He wears a dark gray business suit. He strides up to CARTER and seizes his hand, holding and shaking it through the next two speeches.*)

SEARS—Well, Carter, my boy, I'm glad to see you safely back.

CARTER—(*Pulling himself together and shaking hands*) Thank you. I'm glad to be back, of course.

SEARS—We're all proud of the way you helped clean up on the Kaiser. (*He sits in the chair by the table; CARTER sits on the lower end of the davenport*) Bless my soul, when you were a kid I never thought I'd see the day you'd be leading a comp'ny of soldiers to France!

CARTER—(*Rapidly thawing in the warmth of his old friend's reminiscent mood*) To tell the truth, I never thought I would myself.

SEARS—(*Rather quieter*) By gracious! The day you left I'd have given anything if your dad and mother had been living, to see you.

CARTER—Dad was a great lover of the army.

SEARS—Well, I should say so! You weren't any more than a yard high when he bought you a wooden sword and a pop-gun. Your mother used to be scared to death you'd hurt yourself with 'em, but your dad would watch you by the hour marching up and down and around, playing soldier.

CARTER—Well, there wasn't much playing at soldier this time, I'll tell you.

SEARS—I'll wager not! But Jove! I wish I'd been twenty years younger. And Sally said, when you went, she wished she was in Mary's place. There's nothing of the slacker about Sally either.

CARTER—I hear she was in charge of a good deal of our Red Cross work all during the war.

SEARS—(*Affectionately*) Yes; and I don't know how many refugee garments she's made with her own hands.

CARTER—She's a wonderful woman.

SEARS—She is that. And you've got a wife just like her. I'll wager you're glad to get back to the little lady. My boy, she was a wonder while you were gone!

CARTER—(*Moves uneasily, as though about to be touched on a tender spot.*) Yes.

SEARS—She's a wife to be proud of; she's the best little business woman I know. By gracious, Carter, between you and me, a wife like that is a man's greatest asset. My wife was just like her. We married on nothing. I was a grocer's clerk and she was a dress-maker.

CARTER—(*Astonished.*) Mrs. Sears a dressmaker!

SEARS—(*Solemnly.*) A dress maker. We made a partnership of it for the first few years, both of our backs to the wheel. You see, we knew it wouldn't do to have children if we were going to be grubbing along all our lives, so the quickest way to make a home was for both of us to work together. We saved enough so, at twenty-five, I could start a tiny grocery in a country town. She helped. Every cent she made we saved, and when the store was started she kept the books and worked behind the counter on Saturdays. When our children came we had enough money to surround them with the beautiful things of life, our home was perfectly harmonious, my wife was free from all worry and anxiety over financial matters; she was free to expend her time on the training and education of her children. Those years we worked together seemed the most worth-while years of our life. Those were different days—in those days marriage was a real partnership, and both parties gave

to it all they had. It seems to be different now. It does my heart good to see you two young folks pulling together so well.

(*Carter winces at the last few sentences of this speech.*)

CARTER—Your wife a dressmaker and keeping books in a country store. Well, sir, one would never believe it to look at her now, a leader in society, always—

SEARS—Yes, sir, it's a fact; and if it hadn't been for her I'd never been what I am today. It wasn't her savings alone, but the force she put behind me. She made me succeed, and it looks to me as if your wife were the same sort.

CARTER—(*Weakly.*) Times have changed though. I'm twitted about my wife working.

SEARS—By imbeciles! I know it irks a little. It irked me to have my wife making dresses. But who cares for that today? The trouble with so many youngsters is that today is so darn important. It amounts to nothing. The day that counts is ten years off. (*Breaking off*) Well, well, I suppose I might get down to business. Of course your wife has told you all about my proposition, but as she was kind enough to invite me for dinner, I thought I could go over it with you myself just to clear any little details.

CARTER—(*Bewildered, uncomprehending, but ashamed to give himself away*) Er—oh, yes, certainly.

SEARS—(*Getting papers from his inside pockets*) What's your opinion of it?

CARTER—(*Fighting confusion*) Why—I think—the—yes—so far as I have thought it over, we think it's—all that anyone could ask for—

SEARS—(*He looks at the papers, and we see that he is near-sighted—fortunately for CARTER*) Rate of interest suits you all right?

CARTER—Yes—oh yes—Mary, thinks so too!

SEARS—(*Chuckling*) Your wife certainly was on the job. She may not have mentioned this (*speaking confidentially to CARTER*) but it wasn't five minutes after the wire came telling of Wetherell's death till she was in her boss's office asking him if you could have his agency for their cars.

CARTER—(*Feeling his way carefully*) It's a pretty good position, isn't it—

SEARS—Good position! Say, Wetherell's profits last year were upward of \$15,000.

CARTER—That's a lot of money, isn't it—

SEARS—It surely is, my boy, and Buffalo isn't so far from New York, you know. Mrs. Payan can run down and spend every week-end with you. And even then it won't be so very long until you get the note reduced to \$5,000, so that she can give up her position and you'll be together again—and on easy street.

CARTER—(*Startled, afresh but resolved not to give up the ship*) Yes—the note—er—

SEARS—It's the best I can do. You see, as your wife told you, it takes \$10,000 to swing the deal; and we have to have some security on loaned money. Your wife thought the terms were fair enough. We lend you \$10,000 on your note provided she holds her position until the note is reduced to \$5,000, and your business has proved a success. And you'll make a success of it, I've no doubt. Mrs. Payan's salary will provide living expenses and there will still be plenty to pay up on the note regularly. You'll have all your time to make good in the new field and in a few years you should be independent.

CARTER—It sounds good.

SEARS—It is good, boy. Take it. I'm loaning this money on two grounds—your excellent reputation for industry and honesty, and your wife's influence. If you will let her, young man, she will make you as my wife made me.

CARTER—But I hate to think of my wife providing for the family.

SEARS—My dear boy, while you are thinking, remember that a family consists primarily of two persons, husband and wife. Remember that it is the *duty*—the plain, unvarnished duty of each to contribute all he has to the whole. You cannot think as individuals, but as a unit. One for all and all for one, as Dumas has it.

CARTER—Mr. Sears, I'll have to confess that I have been thinking more lately of all for one and nothing for the whole! You expressed a wonderful conception of the family just now. It's honest, and sound. (*musingly*) The family. (*Rousing himself*) Mr. Sears, I'll call my wife to endorse that note.

SEARS—Fine!

CARTER—(*Goes to center door and calls.*) Mary! Mr. Sears is here. (*MARY appears dressed for dinner and goes to greet MR. SEARS.*)

MARY—(*Graciously.*) Do pardon my rudeness in not being here to greet you when you arrived. I arrived home rather late this evening. Will you accept that as an excuse for my tardiness?

SEARS—(*Heartily*) No excuse is needed, Mrs. Payan. For a few moments I was afraid Carter was loathe to become a millionaire, so I've just been pointing out a few of the advantages of his new position.

MARY—(*Glancing furtively at CARTER.*) Oh.

CARTER—(*Going to MARY and gazing at her humbly and beseechingly.*) Yes, Mary, and he's been telling me about his wife who was almost as wonderful as you are, dear. Mary, will you endorse this note—now?

MARY—(*Happily.*) Really, Carter? Oh, indeed I will! (*She signs the note.*) Carter, I'm so proud of you!

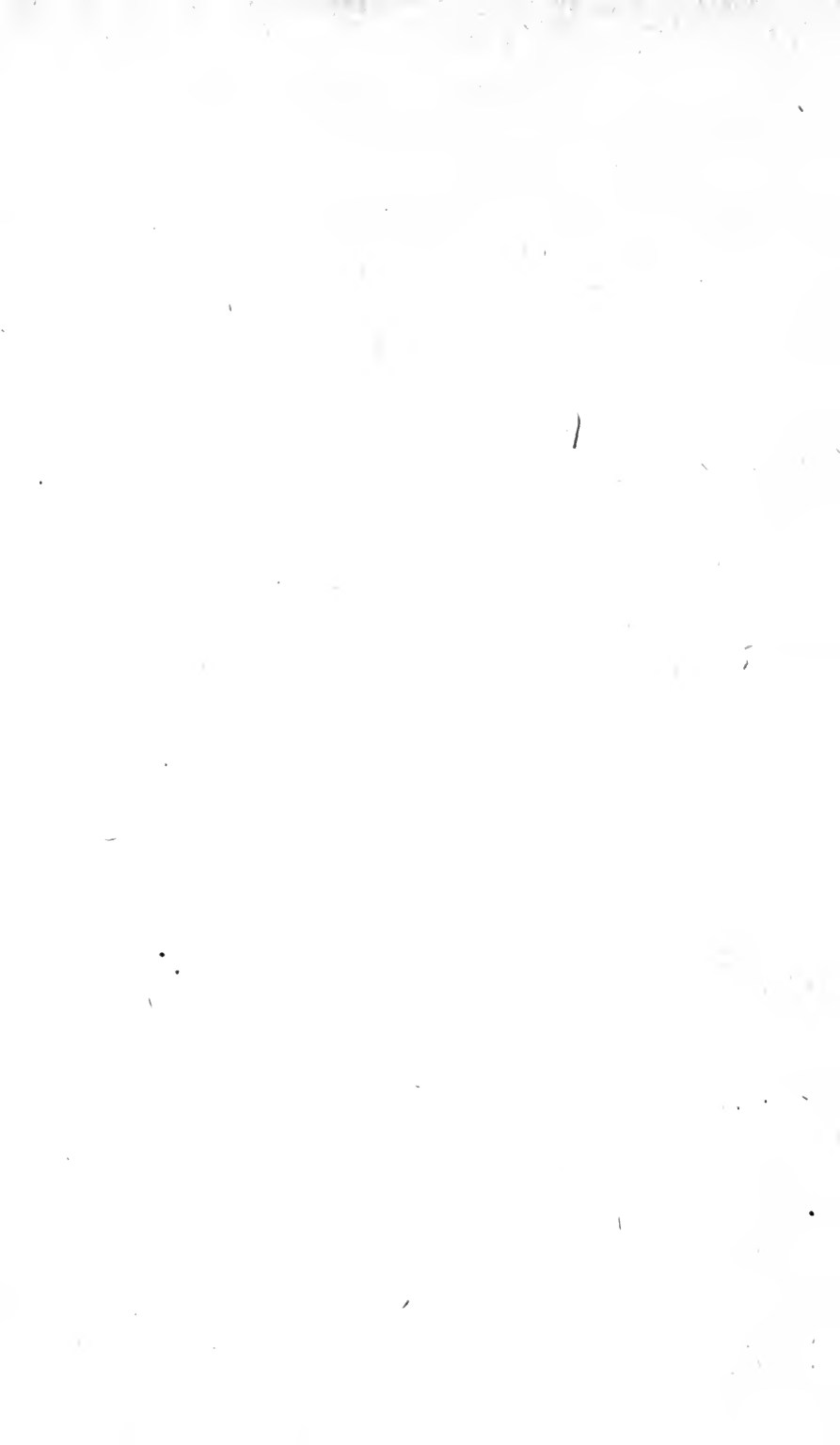
CARTER—Mary, I've learned to appreciate you. But I'm not proud of you. You musn't be proud of me either. What we've got

to do is to proud of us. I've waked up. There isn't such a thing as you or I. There's just the family.

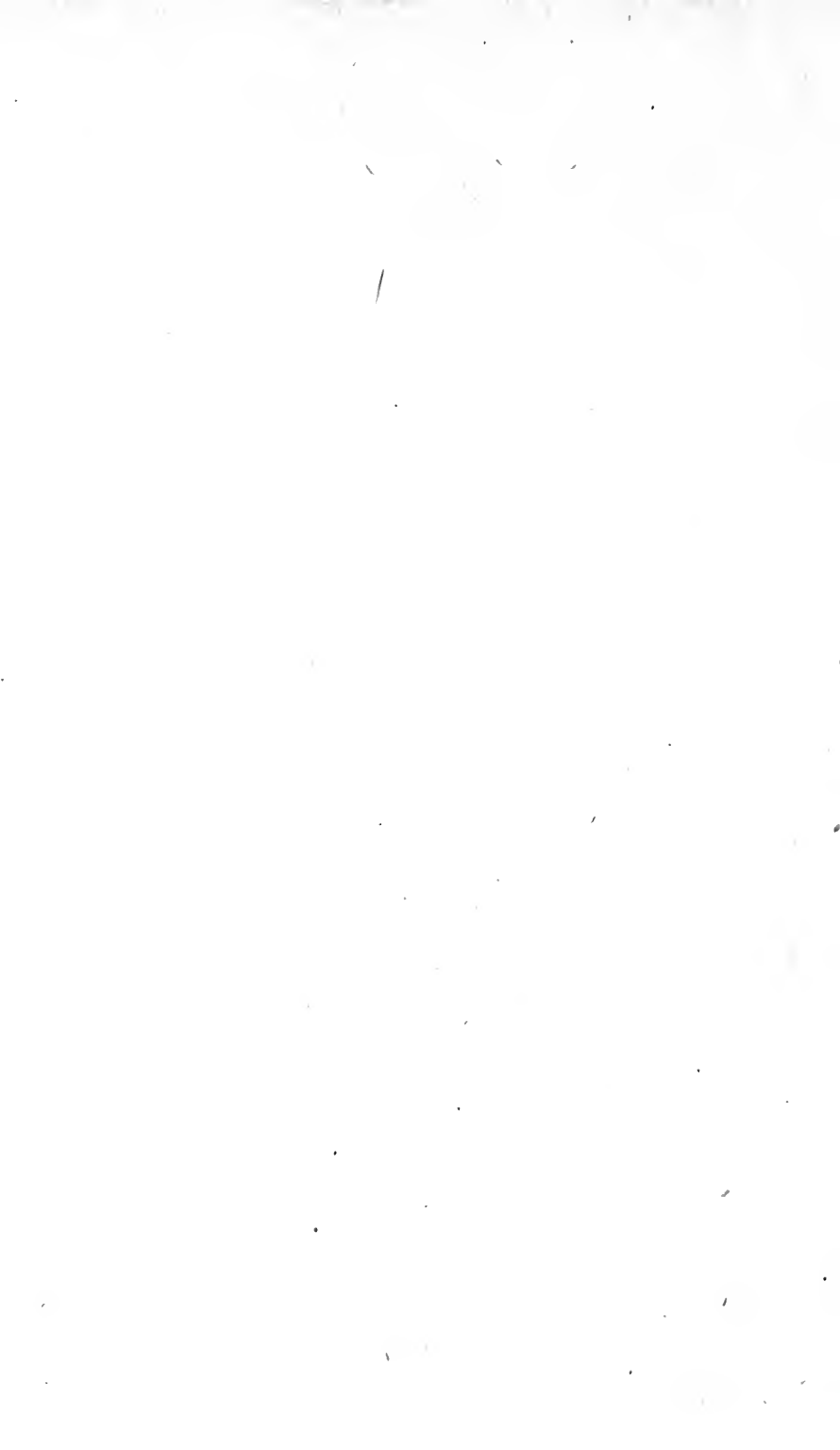
SEARS—That's the idea.

MARY—(*With shining eyes, going to CARTER.*) I just love the family.

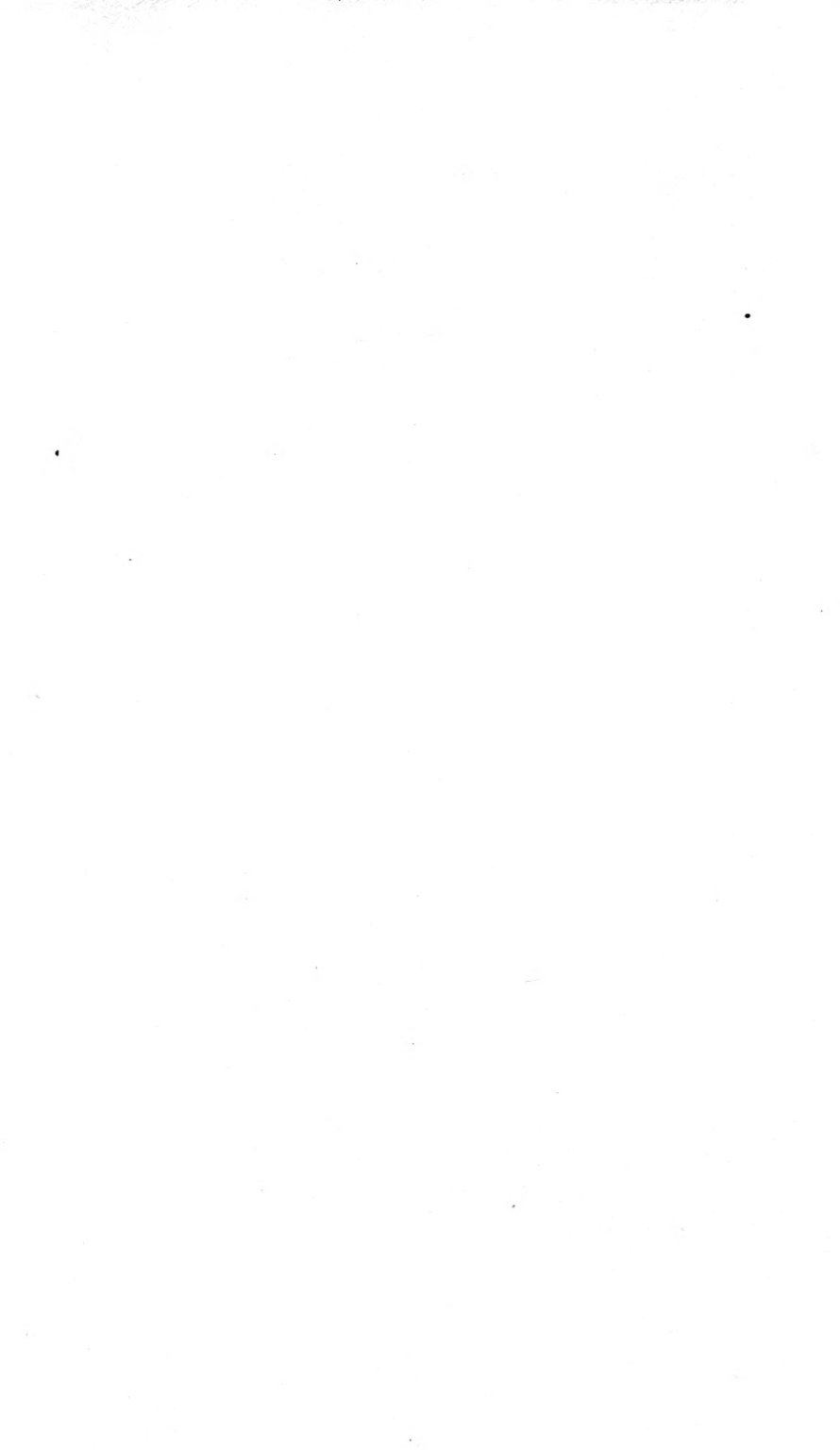
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